

June 11, 1970

Whig or Abolition?

THAT'S THE QUESTION.

It is understood that there are Members of the Legislature—how many we do not know—who propose to carry Ex-Governor Seward, if they can, into the Senate of the United States.

If Gov. Seward were a Whig, *and nothing but a Whig*, and had shown himself content to abide the fortunes of the Whig Party, we should be the last to throw obstacles in the way of his personal aspirations. But the Whig Party is a national party, and nothing less—embracing the Union—embracing South and North together—and we affirm that on his principles, it is *not* a national party, or if it be so, it can not remain one.

In a recent public speech, bearing evident marks of having been carefully written out by himself for the press, this gentleman has proclaimed himself a POLITICAL ABOLITIONIST, and has openly avowed that *he uses the Whig Party, as far as he can, as an agency to maintain and promulgate his principles and objects as such.* He goes farther in this speech, and affirms that there are in truth, now, only two great political parties in the United States, one of which is "THE PARTY OF FREEDOM," or Anti-Slavery, and the other "THE PARTY OF SLAVERY," and that there is and there can be NO OTHER PARTY. Thus he transmutes the Whig Party into an Anti-Slavery or Abolition Party, and in effect proclaims that its principle and its purpose so far as he can control it, shall be THE ABOLITION OF SLAVERY—"COMPLETE AND UNIVERSAL EMANCIPATION."

The speech to which we refer was delivered at Cleveland, Ohio, on the 26th of October last, and was published in the Albany Evening Journal of the 31st of October; and we earnestly call the attention of Members of the Legislature to that speech. It is a manifesto of the most unequivocal and startling character.

The speech proposes two general topics for consideration; "*first*, the principles and policy which the interests of our country and of humanity demand: *secondly*, how we can most effectually render those principles and that policy triumphant." Under the *first head*, six principles are laid down, the last of which is stated in these words; "*A sixth principle is, THAT SLAVERY MUST BE ABOLISHED.*" Immediately it is added, "*I think these are the principles of the Whigs of the Western Reserve of Ohio. I am not now to say for the first time that they are mine.*" Under the *second head*, his position is, that the principles he has laid down, and among them THE ABOLITION OF SLAVERY, can best be made triumphant *through the agency of the Whig Party*—rather than by means of a third party, to which he supposes his hearers, or some of them, inclined.

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He says: "Whigs of the Western Reserve! *We* have maintained and promulgated these principles thus far together, *through the agency, sometimes voluntary and sometimes reluctant, of the Whig Party of the United States.* Some of *you* propose now to abandon that mode, and adopt another." "I have considered your reasons and they are unsatisfactory." "You expect to establish a new and better party, that will carry our *common principles* to more speedy and universal triumph. You will not succeed."

The new party to which he here refers is the Free Soil party, to which some of the Whigs of the Western Reserve had attached themselves. A principal component of it was the *quondam* Abolition or Liberty party, and Gov. Seward goes on to argue that as a third party, it must fail; and the reason given is, that a great party already exists—itself an Anti-Slavery or Abolition party—namely, the Whig party, and between which and its antagonist, the Slavery party, the whole country is divided. He says:

"Society is divided, classified already. It is classified into two great, all-pervading national parties or associations."

"There are two *antagonistical elements* of society in America, **FREEDOM AND SLAVERY.** These elements divide and classify the *American people* in *two parties.*"

There were, at the moment, two great parties in this country, called Whig and Democratic; and evidently in Gov. Seward's estimation misnamed, because the *grand element* of one was slavery and of the other anti-slavery. And he proceeds through nearly the whole discourse sinking the appellatives of Whig and Democratic, to designate the two great parties of the country, the one as the slavery party and the other as the anti-slavery party, or the "party of Freedom;" and he goes on to show how the distinctive policy of each party proceeds from the "antagonistical element" peculiar to such party. According to his doctrine, plainly indicated in this speech, the *leading principle, the grand element* of the party usually called Whig, is that of *antagonism to slavery*, and from this principle or element, its other principles and its whole policy are mainly derived. Its principles depend chiefly on this "element." If this party favors the Union; if it favors equal rights; if it favors education; if it favors national industry and protection; if it favors internal improvements; if it favors peace and moderation; all this is mainly because it is the party of Liberty as opposed to Slavery—it is mainly because that of the "two antagonistical elements of society in America," the *only* elements which "divide and classify the American people in two parties," this party has the element, and is formed by the element of *antagonism to slavery.*

Such is Gov. Seward's unmistakable view of the principles of the great national party usually called Whig, and of what it is that does in fact, and ought to characterize it and constitute the specific and characteristic difference between that party and the great opposing party in the country. According to his view, there are now, and there ought to be, and there can be, but two great political parties in this country—the one a Slavery party, and the other an Anti-slavery or Abolition party; and the Whig party if it is not, ought to be, none other, and nothing less than the Anti-slavery or Abolition party.

On these points he leaves nothing to doubt about. Having shown *first*, that among the principles which the interests of the country and of humanity demand at the hands of every American citizen, that of the *abolition of slavery* is one, and that this very question of Slavery or no Slavery is the one which absorbs or leads all others, and that out of this question

and this question only, arise the "two antagonistical elements of society in America" to "divide and classify the American people in two parties;" having done this, his *next* purpose was to show how this principle of *antagonism to slavery*, with the other principles dependent on it, could most effectually be rendered "triumphant." And here his position is that there had been, and there could be no other "agency" than the Whig Party, for the accomplishment of this purpose.

He declares that thus far he and the Whigs of the Western Reserve had gone together, in maintaining and promulgating the doctrine of Abolition, *through the agency of this party*—sometimes, as he avers, the Whigs having lent themselves *voluntarily* and sometimes *reluctantly* to such an object! And he goes on to urge upon those he is addressing, that this is, and must continue to be; or at any rate it must be made the true Anti-slavery party. He says:

This "party of Freedom seeks **COMPLETE AND UNIVERSAL EMANCIPATION**. You, Whigs of the Reserve, and you especially, seceding Whigs, none know so well as you, that these two elements [*Slavery and Abolition*] exist and are developed in the two great national parties of the land, as I have described them. *That existence and developement constitute the only reason you can assign for having been enrolled in the Whig Party, and mustered under its banner, so zealously and so long.*"

Gov. Seward proceeds to consider the objection which the Whigs of the Western Reserve were understood to urge against the Whig Party, and especially that General Taylor, the candidate of that Party was a Slave Holder. On this point he insists that "the Slave Holding of the candidate is a personal matter, an ephemeral one; the error if it be one, can be corrected. And he puts forth these emphatic declarations on this matter.

"In all things in which the Whig Convention, and Party have differed from you, I have differed from them." "I wish that the American people, or a majority of them, could see slavery to be as odious as you and I do. *Then they would not consent to the administration of the government by any citizen who would justify slavery by precept or example.*" "What then, you say, can nothing be done for freedom because the public conscience is inert? Yes much can be done, every thing can be done. Slavery can be limited to its present bounds; it can be ameliorated; *it can be and it must be abolished, and you and I can and must do it.*"

Let us see now, in a few words what the attitude is, in which Gov. Seward presents himself before the public in this speech.

In the first place, he avows it as a leading political sentiment with him to be carried out in the usual way, that is to say, by the agency of a political party, that Slavery in the United States must be abolished. This is not a mere sentiment of philanthropy. It is not merely the expression of a benevolent wish and desire in which we might *all* join, that by some means or other, which no man's wisdom has yet been able to devise, this country might be relieved from the evil and curse of slavery. It is a sentiment and a purpose strictly political, and to be accomplished by political means—by means of a political party. *"Slavery can be and must be abolished and you and I can and must do it."* It is an object as strictly political with him as the Tariff, or Internal Improvements, and of primary and leading interest, and to be attained in the same way—by means of party. It is not the doctrine of the Wilmot Proviso, which is the doctrine of the Whig party: that leaves slavery alone where it legally exists in the States. This strikes at slavery *in the States*, where it exists under local municipal law, and proposes its abolition there, and by means of a political party. This is Abolitionism—political abolitionism. It proposes to make political war on the local institution of domestic Slavery in the States

and to abolish it there. It insists on "complete and universal emancipation." "You and I can and must do it"—do it, by the "agency" of a political party to which you and I belong, and which we must use for this purpose.

In the next place, Gov. Seward avows that he, and those who act with him in this matter, have heretofore, as far as they could, *employed the Whig Party*, as the political agency for maintaining and prosecuting their design of waging a political warfare on slavery in the states of this Union; and such is plainly his purpose in future. With him, it is not a Whig Party at all; he does not, and will not so consider it; it is a Liberty Party, an Anti-Slavery Party, an Abolition Party. And it is by the agency of this party "sometimes voluntary and sometimes reluctant," that he proposes to wage a war of abolition on every slave state in this Union. "A sixth principle is, that slavery must be abolished." "You," Whigs of the Western Reserve, "you and I can and must do it"—do it, as a political party. "Society is divided, classified already." "There are two antagonistical elements of society in America, freedom [or abolition] and slavery." "These elements divide and classify the American people in two parties." "Society cannot admit nor will it sustain a third party." The Whig party, therefore is, must, and shall be, the Abolition party, and by that agency, you and I can and must abolish slavery in every state where it exists. We must bring this party (as he elsewhere expresses himself) "*into an effective aggression upon slavery.*"

Such are Gov. Seward's positions. We say nothing of the detail of means by which he proposes to operate—except that he strikes *avowedly* in this speech at the Constitution, which he declares in one particular at least to be "*in violation of the divine law,*" and which is therefore by *his express recommendation, to be set aside and trampled upon.*" An oath "to support the Constitution of the United States," which every executive and judicial officer of every state takes, and is obliged to take, would be of no account when in the opinion of Gov. Seward, that Constitution, in its compromises, touches the subject of slavery, "*in violation of the divine law!*"

Every body must see and know, that if his purpose could succeed, and the Whig party be converted into an Abolition party, the Union would *IPSO FACTO* be dissolved. If the two great parties in this country, now called Whig and Democratic, could be made to assume the attitude and mien of an Anti-Slavery or Abolition party on one side, and a Slavery party on the other, from that moment there would be no American Union—no United States of America.

But we do not apprehend such an issue. These parties are national, and they are not and must never become sectional, in the way Gov. Seward proposes. The throne of the one is not, as he alleges, "*amid the rocks of the Alleghany mountains;*" nor the throne of the other, "*reared on the sands of South Carolina.*" The Whig party, at least, has no throne, save in the hearts of the lovers of this great American Union, and those hearts are found in every state and in every latitude of this broad land. The affections in which it is consecrated are no more northern, than southern. Georgia is as good a Whig state and so is North Carolina, as New York or Massachusetts.

And now the question presented to the Whigs of New York and especially to the Whig members of the Legislature, is, whether Gov. Seward is fit to be taken as the true representative and exponent of the Whig party, and of Whig principles in this state, and as such should be sent into the Senate of the United States. Is the Whig party in this state, an Abolition party? Is the *abolition of slavery* in the slave states, a cardinal principle and object of our party? Do we go for "complete and uni-

versal emancipation" as an avowed political object of our party organization? Do we hold that the two parties are no longer Whig and Democratic, but Abolition and Slavery parties? Do we maintain or admit that Abolition and Slavery are the "two antagonistical elements of society in America," and that these elements, and these alone, "divide and classify the American people in two parties?" Is ours a sectional, a northern party? Are we prepared to cut off from our association and communion, as a party, all southern Whigs, and every southern state in this Union? Are we prepared to fling away the Union, to break up this confederacy and government, and tread the Constitution in the dust? Are we prepared to cast off the President we have just elected—to flout him to the face with the declaration made by our chosen Delegate, on the day of his inauguration, that, if Whigs elsewhere held the same opinion as the Whigs of New York hold, they would never "consent to the administration of the government by any citizen who should justify slavery by precept or by example?" Shall the Whigs of New York proclaim themselves to Gen. Taylor on the fourth of March next, and to the country as Abolitionists who believe that no slave-holder is fit to be President of the United States? Shall we declare to him, and the country on that day, that hence forward our warfare as a party is on slavery in the states, on slave-holding, and slave-holders? Shall we proclaim to him, and the country, on that day, that as a party, we the Whigs of New York, recognize no antagonistical party but those who hold slaves, and uphold slavery in the states?

We do not question Gov. Seward's right to hold such opinions as are expressed in this speech; but we protest against his using, or trying to use, the Whig Party as an "agency" for maintaining and propagating them. We protest against his attempt to convert the Whig Party into an Abolition party, or his representing it to be such, and thus exposing it to obloquy, reproach and ruin. And he holding such opinions, we protest against such an endorsement and adoption of him and his principles by Whigs, as would be implied by his appointment as Senator. We know that the body of the Whig Party in this State would revolt at such an utter sacrifice of principle. It is due to ourselves—the Whig Party of New York—and it is equally due to our brethren of the same faith in other States, north and south; it is due to our elected Whig President, and the success of his administration; and due to the Constitution, and to our sacred Union, and to all the memories and glories that cluster around it, that no such act of disunion, disloyalty and political suicide shall be perpetrated. We know that *the body of the Whig Party in this State* will never consent to be deemed to have countenanced such an act of madness.

WHIGS, WHO ARE WHIGS.

January, 1849.